



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Speech
from the
Throne

MARCH 15, 2000



Speech from the Throne

**The Honourable Garde B. Gardom
Lieutenant Governor
at the Opening of the
Fourth Session, Thirty-Sixth Parliament
of the
Province of British Columbia
March 15, 2000**



Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the Legislature,

It's my pleasure to welcome you today to the opening of the Fourth Session of the Thirty-Sixth Parliament of British Columbia . . . and the first session of the 21st century.

All members extend their heartiest congratulations to the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson on her appointment as Governor General of Canada and their sincere thanks to the Right Honourable Romeo Leblanc for his service to our country as the Queen's representative.

British Columbians have every reason to face this new century with confidence and optimism.

But we face it without some of our brightest lights.

We note with sadness the passing those who have made public service a noble calling:

Wesley Black, who served in cabinet for 20 years;

Fred Gingell, who left his mark on this place with his unshakeable faith in the role of the legislator;

Don Munro, who served Esquimalt-Saanich as a Member of Parliament — and served this country as an ambassador in Central America;

Leo Nimsick, who represented the Kootenays in this Legislature for more than a quarter-century;

Lorne Schantz, who served this Legislature as its Speaker for five years;

And John Tisdale, who was the MLA for Saanich and the Islands for nearly two decades.

We are saddened as well by the loss last week of Chief Joe Mathias of the Squamish First Nation.

Chief Mathias was one of those rarest of individuals: someone who had insight into the past and a strong vision of the future. He understood his people's profound connection to this land, their culture and their ancestors. He understood the injustices of the past, and their long reach into the present.

But he could also see the day when those injustices will be righted. And he worked tirelessly for that day — helping to shape the BC Treaty Commission, helping to found the First Nations Summit, and leading the Squamish First Nation.

As we remember him today, let us rededicate ourselves to that day when justice is finally done — the most truly fitting memorial for a great leader, and a great British Columbian.

We have lost other community leaders as well: former Musqueam Chief Edward Sparrow; Gerry Stoney, the former president of IWA Canada; entrepreneurs Clark Bentall and Tong Louie; Norman Richards, the first president of the BC Government Employees Union; health reform activist Sharon Martin; newspaper publisher Tara Singh Hayer, a member of the Order of Canada and the Order of British Columbia; and Major-General Bertram Hoffmeister commander of the Seaforth Highlanders.

We marked the passing of well-known British Columbians like Beachcombers icon Robert Clothier; music producer Bruce Fairburn; mountain climber and author Jim Haverl; racing car driver Greg Moore; author and social activist Bridget Moran; the acclaimed contemporary artist Jack Shadbolt; and internationally respected composer Jean Coulthard.

And one year ago this month, we said farewell to Jack Webster — a tough, but fair-minded scourge of many who have occupied these seats and a great believer in the wisdom of the ordinary person.

The past year and a half have seen many changes in British Columbia. Changes in political leadership, and changes in the political landscape.

Now it is time for changes in the way we conduct politics in this province.

New budget transparency law

My government recognises the fundamental importance of transparency in budgeting.

It is critical that British Columbians have the highest confidence in the budget numbers. Citizens may argue about the choices made in the budget. But they must have confidence that these choices, and the facts and assumptions behind them, are fully and fairly presented.

My government has accepted a broad range of advice on the budget-making process. The Auditor General, the Enns Panel, the Official Opposition and individual British Columbians have been heard — and heeded.

In this session, my government will introduce a new law: the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*.

The aim of this act is to give British Columbians the facts, all the facts, and nothing but the facts.

The new law will make important changes to the budget-making process.

The process of building the annual budget will start with an all-party committee of the Legislature. This committee will be provided with up-to-date information from the Finance Minister on the province's economic and fiscal performance. It will then consult with British Columbians on the provincial budget, and make a public report on its consultations by December 31st of each year.

The new law will set a fixed budget deadline. This will ensure that the budget debate is conducted earlier and is completed prior to March 31st each year.

The new law will require complete disclosure of all budget assumptions and forecasts, including the advice of the Economic Forecast Council. The completeness of this disclosure will be certified in writing by the Secretary of the Treasury Board.

The new law will require the government's bottom line now include the bottom lines of crown corporations and other government agencies.

The new law will open the books on all major capital projects, fully disclosing their objectives, business case, performance targets and, each and every year, the current and anticipated costs to the taxpayer.

The new law will hold the government to a higher standard of transparency if it uses Special

Warrants. However, my government will follow the direction of the Enns panel, and make Supplementary Estimates the rule, not the exception. Supplementary Estimates will be tabled in the Legislature for open debate.

These changes will assure citizens they can be confident about the completeness and transparency of the budget in British Columbia.

But we must go further. When you receive this new law for your consideration, it will not be complete. And for good reason.

My government will keep one section of the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act* open: the section dealing with the estimates process in the Legislature.

The expertise and determination to make that process work lie with this Assembly.

So to you, Members of the Legislature, goes the task of creating this section of the new law, which will ensure the estimates are scrutinized as thoroughly, effectively and efficiently as possible.

As you do that, I encourage you to draw on the guidance offered to us by the Enns Panel and by Fred Gingell, the late member for Delta South.

New culture of openness, co-operation and balance

Just as we must restore confidence in the budget process, we must also restore confidence in this Assembly.

There is a balance we must strike between the need for honest, forceful debate . . . and the need for a new culture of civility, openness, respect and co-operation.

My government will work with the Official Opposition to reach agreement on a parliamentary calendar that will end legislation by attrition, establish workable timelines, and ensure a proper balance between Member responsibilities in this Assembly and in their constituencies.

As the Premier has said: "no one of us knows as much as all of us." My government will seek the assistance of committees of the Legislature to focus on important emerging public issues that transcend partisan boundaries.

Change must come, not only in the rules of this House, but in its culture.

Civility and respect are gained by understanding a fundamental truth in our parliamentary democracy: that Members of this House are rivals, not enemies.

My government will not claim a monopoly on wisdom. But it will seek to achieve critical balances in the budget and in its agenda.

My government will seek to balance the need to maintain vital public services, with the need to cut taxes to fuel economic growth, and the need to control the deficit.

My government's agenda will also seek to achieve critical social balances: a balance between economic progress and environmental safeguards, and a balance in land claims negotiations between sharing economic gains now through interim measures, and negotiating treaties that can be sustained forever.

Moving in an extreme way in any one of these areas would undermine steady, stable progress in our province.

Strengthening and modernizing health care

Finding these balances requires choices. And those choices begin with our universal health care system — the bedrock of family life in Canada and BC.

Health care is the top priority of today's families.

In the coming weeks, my government will set out an agenda to begin to relieve the pressure on our hospitals — the heart of our health care system.

We must address the shortage of nurses today, and expand training for the nurses we'll need tomorrow.

We must reach a new agreement with BC's doctors.

We must further upgrade hospital equipment.

We must improve access to long-term care and home support — to provide better care outside of hospitals.

Money alone will not sustain our public health care system.

We also need innovation. That means providing British Columbians with the right care — at the right time — in the right place.

For example, last fall, Saskatoon offered free flu immunization for seniors and those at risk, well in advance of the winter.

The result was no overcrowding in hospital emergency rooms during the flu season.

My government will bring health care providers, administrators, and other experts — from BC and from outside the province — together this spring for a *BC Health Innovation Forum*.

Our goal is to create an innovation culture throughout our health care system . . . and to broaden the leadership BC has shown in tobacco prevention to other areas.

We will roll up our sleeves and work with other provinces and the federal government to protect and improve universal health care in BC and across Canada.

My government believes that experiments now being launched elsewhere to start Canada down the road to American-style, for-profit medicine are wrong.

The cutbacks to Ottawa's support for health care have put the system under stress from coast to coast.

The federal government's contribution has fallen from 50 cents to 15 cents on every health care dollar. No province, including BC, can hold up 85 per cent of the sky and sustain universal health care over the long haul.

Universal health care is a statement of our fundamental values as a society and a province that we will stand by the sick and the infirm, and that we will work together for the health and well-being of all.

We must renew the national partnership that created Medicare.

Quality education from K to J

Health care helps define who we are as a province.
Education defines who we will be.

Every parent wants their child to have every opportunity to succeed, to get ahead, to do better.

British Columbians know that BC's economy depends on having a well-educated, well-trained workforce. Education is one of the best investments the provincial government can make.

In this session, my government will further improve the quality of education, expand the opportunities for our young people to learn, and work to keep our schools safe from violence.

We will continue to cut class sizes in BC schools. There will be fewer portables, more teachers, and more access to the tools of our modern economy.

By July, every public school in British Columbia will be connected to the Internet through the Provincial Learning Network.

My government will continue the tuition freeze in universities and colleges. We will provide new

support to BC's universities and colleges to create new spaces, and offer new courses.

For many young people, a trade is the ticket to getting ahead in a rewarding career. My government will expand opportunities for apprenticeships and training.

In the new knowledge economy, learning no longer ends with graduation. Education now runs from K to J — from Kindergarten to a good job — and beyond.

Quality education will ensure British Columbians have the work skills, the professional skills, the entrepreneurial skills and the life skills to allow BC to succeed in the modern global economy.

Safe, affordable child care

In this session, my government will begin to build with parents and care providers a publicly-funded child care system. Our first step will be a new initiative to support safe, affordable before- and after-school care.

This will help working parents to better their skills, improve their education and earn a better living, secure in the knowledge that their children are in good hands before, during and after school.

And with the contribution those families make to our economy, we'll all be better off.

Tax cuts to fuel economic growth

My government will pursue a modern, balanced approach to economic growth in B.C.

My government believes that the best way to grow the economy at this time is to stimulate consumer spending by deliberately targeting tax cuts for low- and middle-income earners.

In addition, my government will introduce targetted business tax cuts to encourage job creation.

These cuts may be modest, but they will signal to all players in our economy that my government respects and values all of their contributions.

Consolidating our strong competitive position

BC's envied quality of life gives our work force and our entrepreneurs a strong competitive position in the global economy over the long run.

My government believes the investments we make in maintaining our public health and education

systems, and in preserving our clean and healthy environment consolidate that strong position.

A healthy, educated, and productive workforce is a vital key to British Columbia's success in the modern economy. My government will continue to make these investments to secure both our environmental heritage and our long-term economic future.

In the last decade, my government set a goal to protect 12 per cent of our province's land base in parks and protected areas. During this session British Columbia will reach that goal.

My government will make this achievement permanent through a new *Parks and Protected Areas Act*. This Act will enshrine in law the protection of B.C.'s 550 parks, 141 ecological reserves and 12 special protection areas.

My government is working with the forest industry, workers, scientists, environmentalists, and others to develop new eco-certification for BC's forest products. We will fine-tune the *Forest Act* and the *Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act* to reduce costs while promoting the sustainable use of our forests.

Our aim is to assure our lumber and pulp customers abroad that B.C.'s forest harvesting

practices meet the new certification standards being demanded by our international customers. My government is confident that British Columbians have the knowledge, the experience, and the will to make this happen.

My government will also continue to encourage B.C.'s leadership in the development of new environmental technologies to compete in this \$600-billion global market. Our specific experience in this field of growing importance gives us another strategic niche in the knowledge economy.

My government will establish a *Green Economy Development Fund* to support such green enterprises. It will support research and demonstration projects for made-in-BC inventions.

My government will also examine practical ways in which our tax system can encourage businesses and individuals to shift from environmentally damaging to environmentally friendly practices.

My government will further grow our innovation economy in areas such as film and high tech. Working with the private sector, and building on the success of the BC Film Commission, my government will establish a **BC High Tech Commission** to market our high tech advantage around the world.

Reconnecting to the hopes and values of BC families

My government's objective in this session is

- to reconnect with the hopes and values of BC families;
- to rebuild trust between British Columbians and the new government;
- to rebuild credibility in the budget process;
- to cool down the hot politics in our province;
- to develop a new culture of openness and co-operation;
- to strengthen and modernize health care;
- to improve quality education from K to J;
- to support parents through greater access to safe, affordable child care;
- to cut taxes to fuel economic growth;
- to consolidate our competitive economic position;
- and to bring balance to government, rather than going down the narrow road of an extreme agenda.

I have every confidence in the ability of this Assembly to rise to the challenges I have placed before you.

My best wishes to all of you as you discharge your duties and responsibilities in this first legislative session of the 21st century.